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Dili
Timor

Senator Ramsey
Herewith a draft
Chapter of my book
on Timor, concerning
the situation before
Jan 1975
John Dunn

Chapter 3

The Last Years Under Portuguese Rule

Although subtle changes took place in the pattern of Portugal's administration of her most remote territory in the period following the Second World War, the assumptions underlying Salazarist colonial rule, and the very low position held by East Timor in Lisbon's order of priorities, were hardly conducive to any shifts of a radical nature. In the first place, the economy of the metropolitan power itself continued to be weak; Portugal did not share in the dramatic resurgence of economic activity in Western European countries that occurred in the 1950's. The Portuguese *escudo* remained stable, but by 1965 the nation had become the poorest in Western Europe. The Central Government pinned its hopes for recovery on the glittering prospects offered by its African possessions, especially Angola, and far-off Timor was merely a drain on Portugal's diminishing resources, a poor backward territory with a very uncertain future. Indeed, in 1964 a senior Portuguese official confided that his country would be happy to turn the Timor territory over to the United Nations, if it were not for the implications such a move would carry for the other overseas provinces. For many civil servants a posting to Dili was a kind of penance, and the province was very seldom visited by top-ranking officials. Neither the President nor the Prime Minister ever went to Timor, and the visit of Almeida Santos in 1975 was the first by a minister for overseas Territories since 1952, which in turn was the first ministerial visit ever to the colony. Although post-war Portuguese Timor had its share of dedicated governors and officials, who pressed for changes, reforms and accelerated development to the Central Government in Lisbon it seems to have been an inaccessible liability.

After 1966, when the Suharto regime became firmly entrenched in power in Jakarta, and as unrest and insurgency gripped Portugal's African possessions, the Timor province became one of the few peaceful and stable segments of the sprawling empire, but the demands of the wars in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau further eroded the metropolitan power's capacity to invest in its development. As the regime in Lisbon mobilized its full military

might in a desperate bid to retain the African provinces of such so vital importance to Portugal's economy, Timor remained on the bottom of the priority order. On the other hand, the Portuguese became more relaxed and confident in their Southeast Asian colony. They could afford to reduce their military presence, and more than half of the European force, which at one time amounted to more than 2000 men, were sent to Africa where the pressure of insecurity was mounting each year. Their places were eagerly taken by Timorese who soon formed the bulk of the permanent force in the province. By 1975 all of the ordinary ranks and most of the NCOs were Timorese, but it was not until the last year of Portuguese rule that a couple of full-blooded Timorese, among them Rogerio Lobato, were promoted to commissioned rank - that of *alferes* which is equivalent to sub-lieutenant.

In the context of Portugal's style of colonial rule East Timor constituted an overseas province, based on the Organic Law of Portuguese Overseas territories which was promulgated in 1953. According to this Law, which contradicted the trend of the time towards decolonization, all overseas provinces were integral parts of the Portuguese State. The basic principles of this integration were said to be political unity, spiritual assimilation, economic solidarity, governmental decentralization and financial autonomy. In practice, it was a variant of colonialis adapted to the structure of the corporative state, with its strong emphasis on the centralization of authority and political power, and to the grant pretentions to historic civilizing role which were espoused by the Salazar regime.

Timor was in fact only formally declared an overseas province in November 1963 and its Legislative Council came into existence a year later with 11 elected members. It later became a Legislative Assembly with its membership expanded to 21, ten of whom were elected by a limited direct suffrage, based on property and literacy qualifications. The remainder were chosen along corporative lines, that is, two members by the administrative corps; two members by businesses, associations and economic interests; two members by workers and professional associations; two members by "cultural and moral interests"; and two by the governing authorities. The function of the Assembly was "to advise and assist" the Governor, who presided over its meetings.

In fact, as has already been stated, real power in the government of the Province rested in the hands of the Governor, who was the representative of "the Government of the Portuguese Nation" and who, in any case, exercised legislative functions when the Assembly was not in session. Consistent with the authoritarian character of the corporative state, the Assembly functioned as a focal arena for the mobilizing of public support for policies generated in Lisbon, and as something of a barometer for public opinion. The composition of the legislature always assured the Governor of a comfortable majority, obviating the need for him to exercise his power of veto. The Assembly played little role in preparing the Timorese for self-government, which of course was an alien concept to the Salazar regime. In any case, the few Timorese who served on it were mostly the *liurais* whose vested interest was the preservation of the feudal character of indirect rule. The province also elected a member to the National Assembly in Lisbon, and, along with other provinces, it sent "electors" to cast votes for the President of the Republic, but these functions more closely resembled ceremonial roles than exercises in democracy.

Before the coup of April 1974 the political system in East Timor simply reflected the character of the Portuguese dictatorship, though it was somewhat tempered by the province's remoteness and the limited number of personnel available for control and repression. As in Portugal, a single political party and other functional organizations served to mobilize support for the regime, rather than to act as a check on its actions and policies. No serious opposition was permitted to exist. The power and the authority of the state was reinforced by the existence of the political repressive apparatus, PIDE (later to become DGS, the Directorate General of Security), which, in Timor, kept the "oppositionists" and other malcontents under surveillance, and occasionally took repressive actions against them. They also kept a careful watch on sources of potentially harmful outside influence, including the increasing flow of tourists from Australia and, not least, the occasional visitors from Indonesia.

Security and surveillance outside the towns was largely the responsibility of the territorial administration,

which managed the control of movement from one area to another and other political matters through the *chefe* (later *administrador*) *do posto*, the equivalent of a patrol officer in colonial New Guinea, and through the *chefe de suco* and *liurai*. Of even greater significance, however, was the tight censorship of the media, which, in any case, were in government hands. Through its control of the one newspaper, "A Voz de Timor" which had a circulation of between 4,000 and 7,000 copies per week, and the radio station near Dili, in Timor's remote circumstances the government was able to ensure that the literate segment of the population heard and read just what it wanted them to know. Most of the overseas news came in censored form from Portugal, and the other overseas territories (with precious little about the growing unrest and dissident activity in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique), and there was almost no reporting of events in the Southeast Asian region. Thus during the intense stages of the West Irian and Konfrontasi campaigns, the Timorese had little idea of the turbulent events that were taking place in Indonesia, with whom they shared a common border. A very important source of information, which was readily available to those who possessed a short-wave radio, was "Radio Australia", but only a handful of Timorese spoke English well enough to comprehend its broadcasts, until the very last few years of Portuguese rule. On the other hand the young Mandarin-speaking Chinese were avid listeners to the Chinese language programmes, and were thus rather better informed about events in the region. In retrospect it is interesting to speculate on what the effect would have been, had Radio Australia included Portuguese among its foreign language broadcasts! Although rumours, based on real or distorted facts, were often rife, the control measures of the Portuguese administration did much to keep the Timorese ignorant of, and unprovoked by, the dramatic changes with were occurring elsewhere in Southeast Asia in the three decades prior to the overthrow of the Caetano regime in 1974. The colony's remoteness and its linguistic isolation (Tetum bears little resemblance to modern Bahasa Indonesia, apart from some word-borrowing from the Malay or Javanese language) presented natural obstacles to the penetration of outside ideas, not to speak of nationalism and the spirit of anti-colonialism. It should also be noted that the Portuguese

were greatly assisted in their control measures by a lack of outside interest in the undermining of the established order, and the low level of both political awareness and discontent among the Timorese. It was only in the early seventies that occasional articles indirectly critical of the system began to appear in the Catholic publication, *Seara*, some of whose contributors - Nocolau Lobato, Jose Ramos Horta, Xavier do Amaral, Manuel Carrascalao, Domingos de Oliveira, Francisco Borja da Costa, and Mari Alkatiri - were later to emerge as leaders of the two main political parties.*

It is curious fact that although the border with Indonesian Timor actually divided some *sucos*, who kept in contact with each other even during times of tension - usually on market days on the Portuguese side - these districts were never sources of disaffection, or opposition to Portuguese rule. One reason is that the border areas of Indonesian Timor were a kind of quiet backwater, compared with turbulent political currents elsewhere in Indonesia, at least until 1966 when the blood-letting that followed the attempted coup of September 1965 also spread to West Timor, but this event hardly endeared the system under which their neighbours lived to the Timorese on the Portuguese side. True, the border people perceived some obvious benefits of life in Indonesia, but they also became acutely aware of its disadvantages. Education was more extensive, and thus literacy higher, and the people in the Indonesian province could move about more freely, but, economically, it was a very poor area that the central government had sadly neglected. For example, the best attended markets were those on the Portuguese side of the border, those in Indonesian Timor having little for sale, and then only at exorbitant prices. When the writer visited Bobonaro, one of the main border towns on the Eastern side, in mid 1974, a Timorese who had just returned from a visit to the Indonesian province declared: "*There would be no point in our joining with Indonesia after decolonization. Their side is poorer than ours, and instead of the Portuguese over us we would have the Javanese. This would be recolonization, not decolonization.*". Moreover, the fact that many of the people

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* Jolliffe, op.cit. p. 55-56.

in the neighbouring Indonesian provinces openly resented Java's Moslem or military overlordship caused most of the Timorese leaders, after 1974, to regard Javanese rule as a colonial phenomenon, rather than as a reflection of the demographic realities of the Indonesian republic. Despite the case taken by the Portuguese to avoid provocative actions or statements that might antagonise the Indonesians, between 1958 and 1966 a steady undercurrent of anti-Indonesian sentiment developed in East Timor. During the West Irian and Konfrontasi crises the Portuguese themselves became quite fatalistic about the future, foreseeing an inevitable attempt by the Sukarno regime to seize their province at some time in the future, and such apprehensions were imparted to the Timorese with whom they came in closest contact. Therefore, although it was the policy of the provincial government not to provoke Indonesia by exciting local speculation about Indonesian intentions, it did not prevent individual officials from constantly reminding the Timorese in private of the disasters that would befall them in the event of the departure of the colonial power.

In its last fifteen years the provincial territorial administration was developed considerably, although the pattern and style of colonial rule changed little. The province was divided into 12 districts, called *concelhos* or councils (previously called circumscriptions), with populations ranging from 25,000 in Oecussi to 84,000 in Baucau. The administration of the *concelhos* was headed by the *administrador do concelho*, whose local powers and discretion were in practice very extensive, the incumbent was thus being in a position to dominate the political, social and economic life of his district. Apart from his administrative duties, he exercised the powers of a magistrate, of chief of police, commander of second-line troops, coordinator of economic activity and development plans, and so on. He also usually acted as mayor of the town in which his office and residence, invariably a spacious and solid Portuguese-style dwelling bustling with servants, was located. The *administrador do concelho* was usually Portuguese although, of course, not necessarily white - there were a couple of Goans and some *mesticos*. These senior officials tended to be authoritarian, conservative and uncompromising pillars of the old regime, but

some were nevertheless highly-trained, and by doing their best with the limited resources available to them, won the respect of the people of their districts. Others sought merely to preserve the status quo and to enjoy the perks of office. The *concelho* was divided into between 4 and 6 *postos*, or sub-districts, each administered by an *administrador do posto*. By 1974 there were some 58 *postos*, and the staffing pattern had changed somewhat, with 60% of posts being manned by Timorese who were generally less conservative and, of course, closer to the people than the *concelho* administrators. These officials were among the Timorese to become politically active when, after April 1974, the new regime permitted the formation of political associations. Unlike their Portuguese masters the young Timorese post administrators as a rule harboured little enthusiasm for the sector of indirect rule, which gave the *liurais* considerable discretionary powers and influence. Most Timorese officials, including supporters of UDT as well as Fretilin, wanted the powers of local rulers reduced, as a step towards a more democratic system. They also developed a more informal relationship with the Timorese communities in their *postos*, some of which had more than 20,000 people, and they sometimes combined with the *chefes do suco* to resist the oppressive demands of the *liurai*.

The Portuguese military establishment was a separate branch of the colonial establishment in Timor. By far the most important arm was the army. The naval establishment consisted of a couple of small inshore patrol vessels and a small staff in Dili, usually under the command of a lieutenant-commander, who functioned as harbour-master, as well as the province's naval commander. The only significant naval presence was a visiting frigate which spent its time between Mozambique, Macau and Timor, where it might spend 3 months of the year in what the sailors regarded as their most boring assignment. The Portuguese Air Force was not represented in East Timor, although the pilots of the local airline, Transportes Aeros Portugueses (TAP) were usually drawn from air force units. Indeed, they were usually military pilots who tended to fly the aging De Havilland Doves as if they were F86 Sabres! There was no Air Force commander on the Governor's establishment.

The position of the Army was very different. Since the 18th century the Portuguese Army had played a key role in the running of the territory, as well as in defence and pacification operations. In the long history of the Portuguese presence most of the governors had been army officers (all since the end of the First World War), and from time to time the colony had been under direct military administration. In times of crises, the army had often had to cope with the consequences of maladministration or missionary intrigues. In the post-war years, especially in the sixties and seventies, the army became increasingly critical of the civil administration, and of conditions in Timor in general. This was particularly true of the junior officers and some of the captains and majors. Many of them felt that the army would in the end have to suffer the consequences of a system of administration which was out of date, and had achieved precious little after so long. Then there was the problem of boredom. A posting to East Timor was a dull prospect after the bright lights of Lisbon, and the more developed African colonies, although as insecurity resulting from the war engulfed Portugal's African empire, the prospect of a two year appointment in the peaceful environment of the remotest province became much more enticing. Indeed, as casualties mounted among Portuguese troops in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique, some parents in Portugal tried to arrange for their conscripted sons to be consigned to the Timor command.

From 1960 onwards the Timor military command, usually under a colonel, was divided into several military regions, the most important of which was the frontier region with its headquarters at the town of Bobonaro. The number of European troops varied, reaching a high point of only about 2500 in the early sixties, including infantry, an artillery battery and a cavalry unit equipped with light armoured vehicles. Although for centuries the Portuguese have used Timorese warriors in large numbers to bolster their small garrisons, it was not until recently that they began to train the Timorese as first-line troops, and they were to discover, not surprisingly, that the Timorese, with their long warrior traditions, adapted easily to modern soldiery, especially for guerrilla-type combat. Gradually, Timorese soldiers took the place of Europeans, and by 1974 there

were almost 3,000 fully-trained Timorese in the regular Army (as mentioned earlier, with some NCO's but no officers), and a second line force of perhaps 7,000 with lesser military training. Thus by August 1975, as Governor Lemos Pires was to lament when the civil war broke out, there were only about 200 European troops in the colony, only 70 of them combat troops.

The process of bringing Timorese into the regular army ranks contributed to the growth of political awareness among the educated. A large part of the military training was in the hands of non-commissioned officers and the *alferes*, or junior-lieutenants, many of whom had been conscripted from the ranks of university students or young graduates in Portugal, who as a group tended to be opposed to the Salazar regime. Some were well to the Left. In 1963 a group of these young officers called at the writer's residence in Dili late in the evening and asked whether we could obtain for them some Marxist literature! As a group they tended to develop close relations with the Timorese soldiers under them, whose education they sought to advance. But the political consciousness they awakened was not about nationalism, but about opposition to fascism, or specifically to the authoritarian corporate state which Salazar's Portugal resembled. They knew little about Third World politics, and even less about the radical changes that were taking place in Southeast Asia. Their focus was on European socialism or liberalism, and on political philosophies and practices in Portugal, Spain, Western Europe and Latin America, the Latin cultures. These Portuguese had a considerable impact on the better educated of the Timorese soldiers, whose politic interests thus shaped not by events in Asia but by opposition currents in metropolitan Portugal. Junior officer contacts with the Timorese were broadened through the special role played by the Army in the last 20 years or so of Portuguese rule, when they began to supplement the existing primary and secondary educational facilities. Many of these part-time (and voluntary) teachers were taken from the ranks of the politically unreliable, officers whose academic qualifications were not matched by military skills, and those who had developed a caring interest in the Timorese. In this way, the Timorese often got better instruction from the military than was available to them from the

ordinary teachers. For example, the Lyceum in Dili had the services of Colonel Pastor Fernandes, who was in virtual exile for his part in an abortive coup attempt against Salazar in 1959. Fernandes was a liberal intellectual and physicist, who had been a professor at the Military academy in Portugal. A former associate professor of medicine, who had been arrested and exiled for being in possession of socialist literature, was also working as a part-time teacher. For the troops in the interior, teaching broke down the boredom and monotony of their isolation, and forged links with those Timorese who were anxious to acquire education. As early as 1966, the special schools, as they were called, made up more than 15% of the total.

The discontent and unrest that spread through the ranks of the Armed Forces in Africa also infected the attitudes of Portuguese troops in East Timor, that is to say, from the rank of captain downwards. The senior officers were as a rule loyal to the regime, although even they were privately disparaging about the low level of development, the poverty of the people, and the business monopoly of the Chinese in the colony. But some of the discontent and growing radicalism of the junior officers and the ordinary ranks clearly rubbed off on to their Timorese subordinates, especially the non-commissioned officers. The Portuguese Army's growing disenchantment with the established order and the economic system is Portugal (which meant growing affluence at the top and increasing poverty at the bottom), and their bitterness at having been conscripted to serve the hopeless cause and unreality of Portugal's civilizing mission, ultimately infected the thinking of the educated Timorese, and the influence of these attitudes was one of the reasons why the Timorese troops were, by and large, more attracted to Fretilin than to the UDT, which was more concerned to preserve the status quo in the province. Further, the military at all levels were hostile to the political repressive apparatus (PIDE/DGS) and obstructed its attempts at surveillance, thus protecting dissident views and activities from security counter-measures. In Timor where the *Pide* delegation was small, and where its profile was deliberately kept low in order not to attract the attention of the increasing flow of Australian tourists, the Army seemed to enjoy a kind of immunity from its activities, an immunity

certainly not shared by the civil administration. Portuguese African political values also trickled into the Timorese component of the military from those Timorese or *mestico* soldiers who had seen service in the African territories. One of the best known of these was Roque Rodrigues, son of a Timorese mother and Goan father, whose political views were profoundly influenced by Frelimo sympathesizers he met while serving as an *alferes* in Mozambique.

The considerable broadening of Portugal's education programme in East Timor during the last two decades has already been described. In health and social welfare, the colonial power's achievements were unimpressive, and have been the subject of a good deal of justified criticism. In spite of some improvements in the last 15 years, on the eve of independence, the health of the Timorese population was seriously undermined by diseases like tuberculosis and malaria, which, compounded with continuing malnutrition, kept infant mortality at a staggering level, with some observers claiming that it was as high as 50% in the early seventies. Foreign observers often criticised the Portuguese for their lack of doctors, hospitals and equipment, but it is worthwhile noting that East Timor was much better off in this respect than the neighbouring Indonesian province of Nusatenggara Timor. In 1973 there were 20 doctors in the province 2 regional hospitals, and 8 district medical centres (which the Portuguese sometimes called hospitals). There were also 35 health posts throughout the territory. The Hospital in Dili, the main medical centre in the province, was well equipped by standards in the region. In 1966, Willard Hanna described it as "*a first-class institution, with a well-equipped operating room and a full staff of doctors, including various specialists, who can and do call upon military doctors for assistance*"*. In fact the military doctors were considered a part of the general medical service, and were usually in the majority (in 1973 14 of the 20 doctors were from the military). As in most colonial situations, the problem was that the medical services were largely concentrated in the towns and larger villages, and barely reached the *povoacao*, where some 70% of the population - and the most needy - lived. In the last years there were nevertheless a

series of successful vaccination campaigns which appear to have reached most of the population. There were also efforts to reduce the incidence of turberculosis in some of the worst affected mountain districts. Malaria and influenza, however, continued to take many lives each year, with more than 60,000 cases of each of these scourges registering for treatment annually.

Thus the most neglected areas were disease control, malnutrition and elementary health services at the village level, accessible to the population at large. There was nevertheless evidence that the health and appearance of the population had improved markedly in the ten years prior to mid-1974. In 1974 the writer visited some of the worst-affected areas, and it was clear from the condition of the inhabitants (of villages like Leti Foho), and the presence of health posts, that the position was very much better. It is also noteworthy that the rate of population growth was increasing rapidly: in the fifties the rate was about 1.6%, rising to 1.7% in the sixties. According to official figures, it was growing at a rate of more than 2% in the early seventies, and would have certainly exceeded 750,000 by 1980, if one goes by the official figures. Whatever the shortcomings of the Portuguese system health and nutrition conditions appear to have been no better in the adjacent Indonesian islands. For example, famine conditions in Flores, Lombok and Alor have been an almost annual phenomenon in recent years and have taken thousands of lives, not to speak of similar conditions in Indonesian Timor. The fact is that the islands of eastern Nusatenggara are all prone to severe drought conditions and chronic food shortages, and in most of them the debilitating disease of malaria is endemic.

East Timor's Economy

By 1974 the economy of the province was looking up, but its basic character had changed little. Not far from Dili's thin facade of affluence, most of the Timorese continued to eke out a bare existence in their form of subsistence agriculture, often based on the destructive ladang or slash and burn system, with maize as the principle crop. The Chinese merchants' control of retail commerce was as tight as ever, while they had strengthened their position in the cultivation and export

of coffee. The little economic advancement that had taken place benefited mainly the Chinese, the small Portuguese business community and a number of coffee planters (the biggest of which were Chinese, Portuguese, *mesticos* and some Timorese - often *liurais*). By far the dominant crop was coffee which in 1973 accounted for 146,000,000 escudos, out of the total value of 161,800,000 escudos for all exports. In other words Timor's income from non-coffee exports amounted to only about $A8,000, including copra the only export commodity of which the Timorese were among the main producers.

Of the twenty-five largest enterprises in Timor, all were Chinese except for two large Portuguese firms, the *Sociedade Agricola Patria e Trabalho*, better known as SAPT or the "*Sociedade*", which had been established by Governor Celestino da Silva at the end of last century, and SOTA, the successor to the pre-war Asia Investment Company that had come under Japanese control. Both of these firms covered the full spectrum of business activity in Timor: they possessed large plantations (mostly coffee) and engaged in import/export, wholesaling and retailing. SAPT was the enterprise most closely linked with the provincial government, which held 48% of its shares. The largest Chinese firm, and the most dynamic business in the province was Sang Tai Hoo, which was owned by two brothers who dominated the province's commercial contacts with Asia, mainly with Hongkong, Singapore and Macau. The major Chinese enterprises were also involved in most aspects of economic activity in Timor. All in all there were more than 300 such businesses, which, between them, controlled about 95% of business activity in the Portuguese territory. Of course not all Chinese were affluent, and the community leaders were quick to point out that some 20% were no better off than the Timorese, but by this they did not mean the hamlet Timorese, but the indigenous sector of town populations.

There was very little industry in the province. What there was remained undeveloped and organized on a local artisan basis. There was some wood preparation and furniture manufacturing on a small scale, some textile processing, and alcohol and bread production. East Timor is yet to be proven to be rich in minerals, although for years Portuguese administrations

have placed high hopes on the discovery of oil or copper deposits in commercially-exploitable quantities. In the post-war years oil offered a kind of panacea to Timor's future. Because it actually seeped out of the ground at a location near the town of Suai, the Portuguese presumed that a rich discovery was only a matter of time. However, although an Australia-based company, Timor Oil Ltd., had been carrying out exploratory operations in the area since 1956, sometimes in a desultory fashion, the only real prospect appears to be in off shore drilling. Timor Oil managed to secure an extensive concession but its operations were erratic, and for long periods the company suspended its exploration operations. On a couple of occasions rumours of an encouraging strike caused its share prices to rise briskly on Australian stock exchanges, but its actual performance in the field never seemed to justify much optimism. For more than eight years the company's valuable equipment in East Timor was mostly idle and its shares declined to only a few cents in value. However, Alex Dodson, the Company's dominant figure, was regarded as a valued friend of Portugal and there appears to have been no serious challenge to his concession. Indeed, he was appointed Portuguese Honorary Consul in Melbourne, a post he still holds in spite of the radical political changes that have taken place in Portugal since 1974.

In 1972 International Oils Exploration and Amalgamated Petroleum negotiated a "farm-in" agreement with Timor Oil which resulted in the drilling of two wells near Betano on the south coast of the province, and after some encouraging reports of oil traces a similar arrangement was entered into with Woodside-Burmah in February 1974, with the search being extended off-shore from the south coast. Meanwhile, BHP obtained a concession early in 1972 for onshore exploration of possible mineral resources, the company's main interest being reportedly in steel-hardening additives. These exploration activities terminated in 1975 when the political situation in the territory began to deteriorate, and little is known about what was achieved. However, the prospects for oil and gas exploitation in the off-shore Kolbano area, which was the subject of a seismic survey, have been a continuing source of interest and speculation.

The one industry that had an optimistic future was tourism. Although there had been a slow trickle of curious visitors in the fifties, it was not until 1963 that the first contingent of tourists from Darwin arrived in Timor, emerging from a TAA Fokker Friendship which had just touched down on the newly-constructed airstrip at Baucau. The strip had been designed to accommodate Boeing 707 and D.C. 8 airliners (it was one of the finest in the region), and the Portuguese had hoped to siphon off some of the international flights between Australia, New Caledonia and New Zealand, on the one hand, and Singapore, on the other, in the days when most aircraft refuelled at Darwin. Unfortunately, by the time this fine strip had been completed, the new era of longer distance flights had arrived, and even Darwin's importance rapidly diminished. Slowly the Portuguese began to develop an interest in attracting tourists from Australia, and thus the idea that Portuguese Timor might serve as "*a hill station to lessen the strain of the long, humid summer on the settlers in Northern Australia*" which had intrigued Andrew Fisher at the outbreak of World War I,* became a real possibility. The flow of Australian visitors to the colony increased from 817 in 1968 to 2,278 in 1972. The figure rose to over 3,000 in 1974, before the devastation caused by Cyclone Tracy led to the Darwin-Baucau link being severed for several months. By 1973 Timor had four hotels, five pensions, or boarding-houses, and five inns, or *pousadas*. TAA was operating its chartered Fokker Friendship service to Baucau three times a week, and some Australian companies were beginning to probe investment in the tourist industry. In October 1971, the "Bulletin" reported that Sir Reginald Ansett "*and his full PR team*" had been "*quietly running their eye over all the tourist facilities*" in Timor.* In August 1973 Stephen Claypole, foreign editor of the "Sydney Morning Herald" reported that "*Thiess Petrosea International Holdings Ltd., partly owned by the Queensland coal, civil engineering, and motor vehicle group, Thiess Holdings Ltd., is planning a multi-million dollar investment in Timor's developing tourist industry. And a Sydney investor is raising funds for a brewery in Dili*". One or two Japanese firms

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* "Bulletin" - 23 October, 1971 - John Carnell, "Timor, Paradise for the Hippies".

* "Sydney Morning Herald" - "What About Timor?" - 28 August 1973

were also said to be looking seriously at the possibility of investing in a hotel business in the Portuguese colony. In spite of these bright prospects the real situation was rather less rosy, at least from the Timorese point of view. Many of the tourists were in fact young Australians who sent to Timor in search of a cheap holiday. They stayed at the so-called "Happy Hilton" a sprawling beach hut at Dili, where the authorities charged them $A1 a week, and they were to contribute very little to the tourism business coffers. Furthermore, most of the income derived from tourism ended up in the pockets of the Chinese and a handful of Portuguese expatriate businessmen, who invested a large part of their gains in safer and more profitable ventures outside Timor.

The Role of the Church

One very important component of the Portuguese colonial system was the Catholic Church. Yet the Timorese were not predominantly Christians. In spite of the fact that missionary activity was Portugal's main preoccupation in the colony for most of the first two centuries, by 1975 the number of baptised Catholics was only 200,000, or about one-third of the total population. This relatively low level of conversion seems all the more surprising because the Church has had a free hand in Timor during a long period of colonial rule, during which time it did not have to compete with Islam or with Protestant missions. Furthermore, for the first two centuries the Dominion friars, many of them Goans, were the predominant element in the colony. The *Topasses*, who were to merge with the native elites in Timor and to become a kind of ruling caste, grew up in the social and political environment created by the Dominicans. From the outset the missionaries were closer to the Timorese than were the military and colonial administration establishments. Indeed, on more than one occasion in the early period the missionaries joined with the *Topasses* or other *liurais* in rebellions against the colonial government. But the clergy in Timor was rather less aggressive than elsewhere in Asia in its campaigns to propagate the Faith. Also, in the nineteenth century the Portuguese authorities moved to reduce the power of the missionaries, who for a period were actually expelled from the colony. Then for some years there were only 4 or 5 missionari

in East Timor. But in the first phase of its penetration the Church had made a deep impact by indirect means on the Timorese elites, often antagonizing the Portuguese colonial authorities rather than the indigenous population.

The modern period of the Church's development began after 1912, that is, after the wars of pacification, when conditions for mission activities were again favourable. Nevertheless the rate of conversions up until the outbreak of World War II was not very impressive because of the low level of education, the lack of funds during the depression years, and not least because of a certain apathy and lack of motivation for missionary work on the part of the clergy. The suffering and devastation of the years under Japanese occupation gave some impetus to the work of the missions in the post-war period, especially in the field of education in which it was to play the major role. For example, of the 39 primary schools in the colony in 1952, 33 were run by the missionaries. In that year there were about 60.000 Timorese Christians, with the figure being augmented by another 10,000 annually*. There were 34 missionaries, of whom 28 were secular priests, and only one was not Portuguese.

By 1974 the Catholic establishment had increased to 44 priests (25 of them Timorese) 8 brothers, 49 nuns, 160 teachers, and 37 catechists. The number of Catholics had increase dramatically to 196,570 in 1973 - out of a population of 659,102 (Church estimate). There were more than 80 mission posts in the three parishes of the province, though many did not have priests permanently in residence. By the early seventies East Timor had virtually become a Catholic state, although baptised Christians were still in the minority. Catholicism was the religion of the elite, and of all those with some semblance of education, as well as thousands of illiterates. The *liurais* and other chiefs were mostly converted in the 18th and 19th centuries. Indeed, one governor had decreed that the children of the chiefs must attend religious schools. As the religion of the leaders and the literate, Christianity soon became a kind of status symbol, although many baptised Christians continued to retain their animist beliefs and superstitions. On the other hand, the educate

Timorese were more disciplined in the practice of their faith than were the Portuguese. For example, even some left-wing Fretilin leaders attended mass daily, a degree of devotion attained by very few expatriates.

In the twentieth century the spread of Christianity served two important purposes from the state's point of view. It had a unifying effect, and, particularly under the Salazar regime, the Church was considered an important vehicle for the promotion of patriotism. The Portuguese flag in many *sucos* had become a prized *lulik*, and it was paraded and vertually worshipped in some districts. The flag and the Church were presented as symbols of the temporal and spiritual majesty of Portuguese civilization. The Church in Timor was of a secular character and in the *Estado Novo* it functioned in a kind of alliance with the state.* In matters of religion this institutionalized the authority of the Church, and in matters mundane it promised the security of an assured income. But in a number of ways the Church suffered from this cosy alliance. Not least it appeared to have become bureaucratic and undynamic, most of its officials accepting uncritically the dubious social and political goals of the Salazar regime. The Church did not acquiesce to all government policies, but its commitment to the basic objectives of the regime eroded its flexibility and afforded it little scope for independent action. In a sense the state perceived the central role of the Church as giving a moral legitimacy to Portugal's revamped colonial order and her historic "civilizing mission". Within this framework there was little room for the expression of a social conscience.

However in spite of the constraints imposed by its role within the corporative state, and of the apathy of some of the clergy, in the post-war years the Church became an influential and respected force among the Timorese, including those who had not espoused the faith. The clergy had not resorted to coercion to bring about conversions, and there were no anti-Catholic movements in Timor to generate negative or hostile

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* In 1940 Portugal signed a Concordat and Missionary Agreement with the Vatican, under which religious activities in the overseas provinces were regulated.

attitudes. But more importantly, the priests were respected for their tolerance and their frequent timely interventions with the administration on behalf of Timorese seeking to redress injustices or to obtain assistance of one kind or another. Also the clergy often visited remote villages which were seldom seen by *concelho* officials. Its representatives regularly collected information and statistics. The villagers were less inhibited in their relations with Church officials than with those of the State because the former neither taxed nor punished them. Their demands were few and most priests were prepared to take up grievances against local officials or *liurais*, often providing the most effective channel open to the Timorese. In times of distress and suffering, such as during the Japanese occupation and after the Indonesian invasion, the people turned to the clergy for succour and comfort, although there was often little the latter could do to bring about real relief.

Nevertheless the Church in Timor was not without its serious shortcomings, apart from the apathy and conservatism of many of its priests. Its social work tended to be concentrated on the main towns and villages, where most of the Catholics were to be found, and the most needy received too little of its attention. The Church's capacity to act as a social conscience and to press for reforms (as in Latin America) was seriously weakened by its alliance with the State, and its dependence on the latter for financial support. On the other hand, with its more than 80 mission posts the Church's information resources were probably the best in the province. Indeed many officials believed that the Catholic Mission's record of the census was more reliable than the figures collected by the government, if only because the Timorese hamlets often understated their populations to the administration in an effort to evade the full force of the *imposto*, or head-tax. In 1973, according to the official mid-year estimate, East Timor's population stood at about 649,000, but as the Church Mission assessed it, the figure was 659,102 people. As in the early years of Portuguese influence, the clergy, with their mission posts and extensive role in primary education, had a closer and more informal relationship with ordinary Timorese than any of the other aims of the Portuguese colonial establishment in Timor. Although most of them probably

urged their flocks to come to terms with their poverty and underdevelopment, rather than press for much needed reforms, they were neither ignorant of, nor insensitive to, Portugal's dismal record of achievements in the colony, and the gap between the official rhetoric and the realities of village life. Unlike the governors or military commanders, who usually spent only 3 or 4 years in the province, many Church officials sometimes spent a life time in the diocese. Bishop Jaime Goulard, for example, came to Timor as a young priest in 1933 and spent the next 33 years in the colony, apart from 3 years in Australia during the Second World War, to where he was evacuated by the Australian commando force.

No analysis of the role of the Catholic Church in East Timor would be complete without mentioning the small Jesuit group who ran the seminary, Nossa Senhora de Fatima, at Dare, some 2000 feet up in the hills behind Dili. The Jesuits had been in Timor for only a century or so, and theirs has been a chequered career, reflecting the uneasy relationship between Church and State that had persisted until Salazar came to power - and also suspicious attitudes towards the Jesuits from within the heirarchy of the Portuguese branch of the Church. Indeed, as recently as 1910 some Jesuit priests and Canossian sisters were expelled from Soibada amd Manatuto. But the importance of the tiny group of Jesuits in recent times was in their role since 1958 as teachers in the Seminary which, apart from being the highest institution of learning in the colony, was attended mostly by Timorese. The Jesuits were often critical of the system and conditions in the province, and some of the priests sought to enlighten their charges about the changing scene in Asia, about the forces of nationalism, and occasionally about more progressive approaches to development. From the Timorese point of view the environment of the Seminary was much less conformist and conservative than in other high schools, and an easy informal atmosphere prevailed within its grounds. Above all the Seminary tended to make the Timorese more conscious about themselves, their country and its future. In other schools there was a much greater emphasis on things Portuguese, in which the small remote province of East Timore played an insignificant and servile part. The products of the seminary were to become an

influential part of a new Timorese elite. A few chose to become priests, but the majority turned to teaching or joined one of the branches of the local civil service or the military. The fact that many of them subsequently joined Fretilin gave the Seminary an undeserved reputation for radicalism, especially in Jakarta. Although they were less conservative than the Portuguese secular clergy, the Jesuits were hardly exponents of revolution. Ironically Father Rabago, a former Rector of the Seminary, was among those who was later to see in Fretilin the seeds of a Communist movement.

When the Portuguese withdrew from Dili at the end of August 1975, it was just over two hundred years since Governor Meneses had moved the seat of government there from Lifau, in Oecussi. In that long period of settlement their achievements were on the whole unimpressive, and they left the colony as one of the poorest and least-developed countries in the Third World. It has thus become fashionable in some countries to place the entire blame for the tragic events of the past six years on the Portuguese. Yet, in a way the Portuguese have been done a serious injustice. Would East Timor have been more developed today if they had abandoned the island entirely in the nineteenth century and had left it to the Dutch? It would then ultimately have become part of Indonesia, and would have endured the neglect experienced by the other half of the island and the nearby islands of Alor and Wetar, which are if anything less developed than was East Timor on the eve of the Indonesian invasion. Perhaps this territory was doomed to be neglected not just because of Portuguese indolence, but because it had little to offer any colonial power; no proven resources, no fine harbours, no strategic importance, and a geographical setting well away from the main sea lanes and tourist centres. These disincentives would have kept the interest and investment of any colonial power at a very low level, and by the twentieth century Portugal was by far too poor to do other than preserve the status quo. And it was the British, Portugal's oldest ally, who deterred the Australians, who were in a better position to develop the territory from exploring the possibility of acquiring the colony from Portugal, which, in the post-war years, was soon to become a valuable member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

As a system of colonial rule the Portuguese practice was probably not much worse than any other colonial system. The style of the corporative state gave it an oppressive appearance, but, at least in the last years, despite its paternalistic and somewhat authoritarian character, it was not so oppressive. Its main weakness was that it did not prepare the Timorese for the possibility of a future without Portugal, and certainly not to be identified with Timor's Asian environment. In a sense, the long years of Portuguese influence, the form of education and religious teaching served to alienate the Timorese from the Southeast Asian family of cultures to which they probably belong. In spite of the relatively low level of literacy - which is not the only measure of cultural influence in a colonial context - the Timorese were to a point "latinised", partly through assimilation in the days of the *Topasses*, who became Portuguese and then drifted into the ranks of the elite of Timorese society.

In a sense it was the weakness and smallness of Portugal herself that moulded the peculiar style of her colonial rule and her relations with the indigenous peoples. From the very outset the tiny colony of representatives of the colonial power had to bargain, compromise, and make deals with the Timorese *liurais* - and often to enlist their support - in order to survive, because the plain fact was that the Portuguese rarely had at their disposal sufficient military force to impose their authority directly and decisively. It was not simply a matter of divide and rule: the Portuguese would never have been able to survive a total uprising against their hegemony. The Portuguese thus contrived to maintain a rapport with enough of the Timorese kingdoms to enable them to cope with the rebellious *liurais*; indeed, it was mostly the Timorese warriers commanded by loyal chiefs who brought the battles and not Portuguese soldiers.

In administration the Portuguese had neither the people nor the funds to set up their own professional corps of officials, so from the outset they were forced to make the best use of local resources, and to resort to indirect rule to compensate for their own inherent weakness. To them localization was less a matter of principle than a matter of necessity. Even in

commerce, it was the Chinese who emerged as the medium for indirect commercial exploitation - the wholesalers, shop-keepers, and the food and grain merchants.

Thus the pattern of Portuguese colonial rule was conditioned by its indirect nature in its political, military and economic aspects. This also applied to religious activities. By the time a large section of the population had been converted, the majority of the ordinary parish priests were themselves Timorese. It emerged, then, that the Portuguese had a much less visable and oppressive presence from the Timorese point of view than in the case of most other colonial regimes. As a general rule it was Timorese troops or police who dealt with rebellions or malcontents, even in recent times. In commerce it was the Chinese who forced the Timorese to sell cheaply and buy at exorbitant prices. And finally the unpleasant tasks of collecting taxes and conscripting labour for public works (a practice abandoned in the last years of Portuguese rule) was assigned to *chefe de sucos* and Timorese officials who had to confront the local population.

The Portuguese capacity for assimilation, and the almost complete absence of colour prejudice kept a traditionally important source of discontent from the colonial scene in East Timor. When the writer was in the colony in the early sixties, he was struck by the racial mix at every level of the administration. The Chief Justice was Goan (and his wife Chinese), the leading surgeon African and the Director of Customs Timorese. Indonesian propaganda since the invasion, which has sometimes been repeated by prominent foreign visitors to the "27th Province", has claimed that in Portuguese times the beach near the capital (Aria Branca) was reserved for whites. Whatever the faults of the colonial power, nothing could have been further than the truth than this allegation. That particular beach (which the author frequented) was patronised by an extra-ordinary mixture of races, with Europeans, Africans, Indians, Chinese and Timorese all seeking relief from Dili's oppressive tropical climate.